

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

April 14, 2015

5:59 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Louise Stutes, Chair
Representative Neal Foster
Representative Bob Herron
Representative Craig Johnson
Representative Dan Ortiz

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Charisse Millett
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S)

Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission

Benjamin Brown - Juneau
Verne Rupright - Wasilla

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

BENJAMIN BROWN
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As appointee to the position of the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission, discussed his qualifications and answered questions.

VERN RUPRIGHT
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As appointed to the position of the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission, discussed his qualifications and answered questions.

MARTIN LUNDE, Representative
Southeast Alaska Seiners Association

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Appointees Brown and Rupright.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[5:59:38 PM](#)

CHAIR LOUISE STUTES called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 5:59 p.m. Representatives Herron, Johnson, Ortiz, and Stutes were present at the call to order. Representatives Foster arrived as the meeting was in progress.

[5:59:58 PM](#)

CONFIRMATIONS: Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission

CHAIR STUTES brought before the committee the appointments of Benjamin Brown and Verne Rupright to the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission. [Packets contain biographical information on both appointees.]

CHAIR STUTES advised that both appointees will offer their testimonies and public testimony will then be opened.

[6:00:40 PM](#)

BENJAMIN BROWN related a brief biography, as a life-long Alaskan, and included his law studies in Boston, service in each branch of state government, private practice of law, current position as a Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission commissioner, and has lived in Juneau since 2001. He noted that things appear to be in transition across state government and he expects it to be an interesting 4-year term. He offered that whatever challenges are presented, he will meet them fairly and honestly to the best of his ability.

[6:02:45 PM](#)

VERN RUPRIGHT offered a brief biography, including military service, work on the pipeline, obtained a law degree, private practice of law, work in state government, and recalled his 6-year term as mayor of Wasilla prior to his appointment by Governor Walker.

[6:05:10 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked whether he would relocate to Juneau, if confirmed.

MR. RUPRIGHT responded that he would relocate to Juneau and would treat it as a "slope job," as his is a two-year appointment.

CHAIR STUTES opened public testimony.

6:06:13 PM

MARTIN LUNDE, Representative, testified in support of both appointees, praising the knowledge, skills, and expertise both Commissioner Brown and Commissioner Appointee Rupright are expected to bring to the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission's (CFEC) work in preserving Alaska's fishery resource by serving the fishermen who earn their living harvesting Alaska's fisheries. He said that Commissioner Brown not only has a background in law, but time on the ground in maritime and fisheries law. Thereby, he pointed out, Commissioner Brown's experience enables him to address the decisions and intricate workings of the state's special limited entry system and other branches of government. He advised the Southeast Alaska Seiners Association supports the appointment of Mr. Rupright, in that he wasted no time in tackling issues concerning the CFEC, and with his years of leadership experience and managing personnel is the person to help lead the people within the agency. In addition to his organizational management and project planning, his years of practicing law provides the backdrop for competent and deliberate decisions.

CHAIR STUTES closed public testimony after ascertaining no one further wished to testify.

6:09:31 PM

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ noted that Mr. Brown served at the pleasure of Governor Parnell, and asked what had been the most challenging part of the job.

MR. BROWN responded that the extension of the sunset of the Weathervane scallop program in that it is a specific portion of law, and he was not successful. Also, generally speaking, every case before the commission is fact intensive and specific with many older cases, he advised.

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ asked how many different fisheries are served by CFEC.

MR. BROWN answered that the CFEC limited entry to 68 fisheries, and 67 are still limited because the sunset came into effect for the Weathervane scallop vessel based limited entry system.

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ questioned whether he perceives any fisheries more difficult than others for permitting purposes.

MR. BROWN replied that CFEC recently received proposals from fishermen, in particular a Southeast fishery, asking to use a different gear-type. He opined there may be a provision in the law allowing CFEC to do that, but he is not sure. For an example in how things are changing, he explained, an action recently taken by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council allows the use of pots to harvest sable fish in the Gulf due to a greater efficiency in preventing bycatch and preventing whales from stealing sable fish off of the long lines.

[6:12:34 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked Mr. Rupright about his experience in the area of fisheries.

MR. RUPRIGHT related his only experience was in 1985 while trying to develop up, and revive, the clamming operation in Kachemak Bay.

CHAIR STUTES pointed out that this is a new learning curve for him.

MR. RUPRIGHT answered that he was familiar while growing up, and has been around fisheries in Alaska for 40 years.

[6:13:29 PM](#)

CHAIR STUTES announced that the House Special Committee on Fisheries reviewed the resumes and recommend the names be forwarded to a joint session for consideration. Hearing no objection, she advised this does not reflect the intent by any members to vote for or against these individuals during this session or further sessions for the purposes of confirmation. [Hearing no objection, the names of Benjamin Brown and Verne Rupright were advanced.]

[6:14:15 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 6:14 p.m.